



Patrick Ledesma is a National Board-certified teacher and School Based Technology Specialist in Fairfax, Virginia, where he focuses on instructional-technology integration and special education at the middle school level. For the 2010-2011 school year, Patrick is serving as a Classroom Fellow with the U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Ambassador Fellowship Program, as well as working on teacher recruitment and outreach for the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The opinions represented in this blog are his own.



Patrick Ledesma

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## Technology Integration Isn't About Technology

By Patrick Ledesma on May 22, 2011 9:51 AM | [9 Comments](#) | [Recommend](#)

This week the Apple Retail Store turns 10 years old. While the concept and appeal of the Apple store today can be seen in the numerous stores that have opened worldwide, ten years ago, there was a fair share of doubt and criticism that an Apple store would succeed. There is much to be learned from the success of these stores.

Back then, the vision of an Apple store did not match how we viewed and experienced a technology store.

The "first" retail store opened in Tyson's Corner shopping mall in McLean, Virginia in May 2001. I remembered visiting the Apple store after it just opened. Despite the doubts from critics, the store was packed with people.

Most importantly, I remembered the atmosphere and vibe being very different from the other "tech" stores I usually visited. At the Apple store, it was noisy; and a diverse group of people (OK- men, women, couples, teenagers, and kids) were talking and playing with the different devices.)

*This was a store about lifestyle, not technology.*

I compared this social and interactive experience to my other favorite large, specialized, technology stores that sold computers. When I visited these stores, I was usually alone. (My wife considers visiting such a store, with its long aisles of different internal computer parts to be complete torture.)

Visiting this store was a quiet experience. There was very little diversity. (OK- mostly older guys by themselves.) If there was any conversation in this store, it was usually about how to overclock the CPU to get faster frame rates on their games or applications. It was about how to modify the internal components of our large boxy beige computers. These are very interesting topics... for some people.

*These were stores about technology.*

Ten years ago, I had several choices of large technology stores to visit. Now almost all of them are out of business. Ten years later, Apple stores are everywhere.

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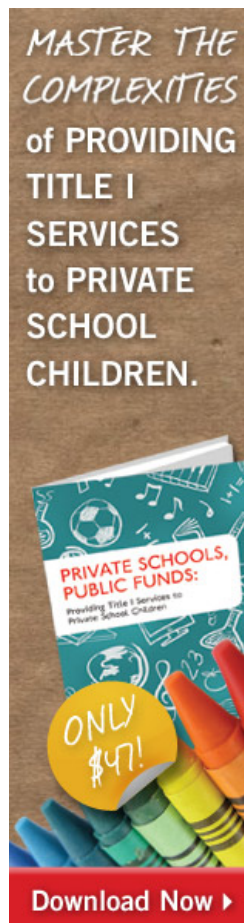
What was the difference among these technology stores?

As Gary Allen from MacWorld explains in [a recent article](#):

*In a span of ten years Apple has changed how technology is presented and sold, converting it from a cold and impersonal interaction to one that highlights the creative and fun side. There were many skeptics when Apple's first stores opened in 2001, but now companies everywhere are scrambling to duplicate Apple's success.*

Apple understood that technology was about lifestyle and enhancing quality of life. Technology was not about the internal parts of a machine. *Technology was about listening to music. It was about creating something. It was about interaction and communicating with others.*

Apple's commercials emphasized lifestyle over technology. Remember the first iPod commercial:



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Do you notice the absence of technology jargon and specifications in this video? More importantly, did you notice the focus on application and process of using the technology to do something else (listening to music in this example)?

Apple was selling what you can do with technology and, most importantly, how easy it was to use it. I had a competing music (MP3) device at that time that was far superior, from a technology perspective, to Apple's iPod. But, it was very difficult to use. Apple thought about ease of use. Their competitor did not.

### **Educators can learn a lot about using technology with students from the Apple philosophy.**

It's about purpose and ease of use. We should focus on enhancing and enriching the learning experience by defining the goals and processes for why and how students will use technology.

If we did this, we would look beyond our current preoccupation with the appearance of just having the "latest and greatest" technology devices and pay more attention to how these resources should be used to improve the student learning experience.

*Too often, like my fellow technology geeks who enjoyed browsing long aisles of computer parts to have the "latest and greatest," educators become preoccupied with wanting to have the "latest and greatest" without thinking about purpose, process, and support.*

We'll buy the devices for schools, and not think about what exactly students will do with the device or how they will use it. We'll give teachers the latest tools, but not think about the policies, time, and support they will need to use these tools effectively.

Apple understands these challenges, which is why they offered 1:1 lessons, workshops, and support in their stores. They knew that customers should not be tech geeks to enjoy their products. In hindsight ten years later, is their success that surprising?

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So before buying that technology, think about what you'll do with it, and how you'll do it.

And remember these important points:

*Does technology enhance the quality of your life? If so, you know that technology isn't about the hardware specifications or code in the software, it's about how the use of technology has brought you more happiness because it helps you access or do something you enjoy.*

*Does technology enhance the quality of learning in your classroom? Do you collaborate and learn from your colleagues, share resources, and access the collective knowledge and resources on the Internet? Are your lessons more enriching and engaging through your use of interaction, multimedia, and creative authoring tools? Are your students more inquisitive, analytical, and creative as they use technology to collaborate, create, and apply their learning in real world contexts?*

If your answer is "yes," then, you know that technology integration in schools is about the learning process, and not about technology.

If your answer is "no," then it's time to start thinking about why you have these tools, and how you can start using your existing resources more wisely.


*Disclaimer: Despite the Apple-centric focus of this blog post, in reality, the author favors all brands of technologies when the devices are used wisely, and enjoys visiting the Apple Store, and the other large technology store (even if his wife refuses to go with him).*

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[sanwoz](#)

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12:10 PM on May 24, 2011

I agree that we have to think first about what our objectives are and then pick the proper tools and activities to reach those goals. It follows the philosophy of Grant Wiggins' Understanding by Design. It should not be a matter of figuring out where these tools fit in, but as you say, using them to enrich and engage our students in their own learning.



[Patrickc45](#)

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11:43 AM on May 25, 2011

Excellent article, Patrick!



[LDewar](#)

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8:55 AM on May 27, 2011

I don't disagree with anything in this article. In fact, I think Ledesma has put his finger on the exact disconnect that exists between what we do and what we really want to do. The problem, however, is systemic, not academic. The fact is, it is our